

White Paper

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NEH Next Generation PhD White Paper

Penn State University

I. What Happened

We spent most of the fall talking, and most of the spring developing proposals for change. The discussions were divided among four working groups. Each WG issued a midyear report, and then in the spring developed a list of 3-5 concrete proposals for the Penn State's College of the Liberal Arts. Throughout the report such major proposals are marked with the letters CP in bold type.

Beyond the Seminar Working Group

This group was focused on thinking about alternatives to the standard graduate seminar. It included four members, and came up with five recommendations, most of which revolve around eliminating some or all of the traditional graduate seminars, and focusing instead on skill-building. (1) more team-taught survey courses (2) more publication workshops (3) faculty-led informal writing groups (4) teaching assignments in lieu of seminars, and (5) university (administrative) internships in lieu of seminars.

The major challenge to any of these changes is not at the College level, or even at the level of the Graduate School—which does not require any course credits for the PhD—but in the departments. Though departments are quite willing to develop extracurricular programs that help prepare students for the professorial job market and other job markets—publication and CV workshops, for instance—they are strongly resistant to any change to existing course structures or requirements. We speculate on the reasons for that resistance below.

In any case this means that the College has very little leverage to enforce significant change at the level of individual PhD programs. For that reason, following its Spring meetings, this group made one very specific recommendation to the Dean: that the College needs to incentivize (through financial support and other departmental-level “rewards”) this kind of change at the departmental level. ***CP1***

Internationalization Working Group

This group ended the Fall with four recommendations, including (1) internationally co-taught classes, (2) faculty exchanges/development, (3) international student exchanges, and (4) internationally granted co-degrees. This group has had the most trouble thinking outside the academic box; all the things they are proposing would be good ideas but have no specific skills-based purchase on employment outside the professoriate; they simply increase language and culture skills among graduate students, or focus on academic job placement in universities outside the United States.

In the Spring, this group produced a series of proposals that included asking for financial support for these events; the most significant of these involved a request to hire someone focused explicitly on international career development in the College's career office.

Dissertation Alternatives Working Group

This group ended the Fall with four recommendations for creating a number of pathways towards the humanities PhD, including: (1) moving students beyond a single-author monograph model, (2) replacing the hierarchical committee structure with project-management style collaboration (that is typical outside of academia), (3) creating programmatic spaces that replace isolating dissertation experience by requiring more group and public dimensions as part of the dissertation producing process, and (4) encouraging a sustained program of flexible, rigorous research with broad application.

Some of these ideas, like 1 and 2, can only be implemented at the departmental level. There are no obstacles to implementing them, other than (lack of) faculty or department head resistance. The other goals prompted us to merge this group with the Next Gen working group in January 2017; see below.

New Directions Working Group

This group was in many ways the heart of our grant proposal. It was tasked with developing an academic program that would integrate internships (with governmental, educational, nonprofit, arts-and-humanities-oriented, or corporate entities) into the PhD program. The challenge was to come up with a basic structure for this program, and to imagine the forms of institutional support (both in terms of professional development for non-professorial employment, and in terms of academic development towards the PhD) that it would require. We also spent a lot of time talking about how to get faculty and departments on board.

The best thing about this group was that it included former PhD students now employed outside academia, as well as a member of the PSU Board of Trustees with significant non-academic employment. We consulted with nonacademic employers, particularly in corporate space (mainly Amazon and Microsoft). We also benefited tremendously from the presence of Susan Knell, director of the College's Career Enhancement Network, which is essentially our job placement office for undergraduate students. She kept us from making a couple really critical errors.

We have now developed the structure and outline of such a program ***CP 2***. Our original goal was to be ready to apply for a Next Gen Implementation Grant in February 2018; inshallah, the NEH and the program will still be available, and we will do so. We have also, because things felt too urgent to wait, developed a pilot version of this program, complete with timeline and outline for academic and professional development.

As a result we have two students, one in Comparative Literature and one in History, now piloting the program we would like to implement full-time. Both students have just completed their first year at Penn State. Both are, to some extent predictably, focused on internships in what one might think of as "social/liberal" space—one in LGBTQ advocacy, and the other in public history. They will have career and professional counseling, as well as academic counseling, this year, and will take up their internships in Summer 2018. We will be working with them to integrate that internship experience into their academic development, and with their departments and committees to ensure that their eventual dissertations will also reflect that experience. We are also working with them to plan a second internship experience in year 4 or 5 of their program here.

This coming Fall, we plan to announce the program again, and to run the pilot for a second year. (Again, the scope and breadth of the program may change depending on the NEH situation, though probably not for 2018-19; we are planning on offering places to up to three additional students).

In the “what will happen” category, we are also scheduling programming (including visits from outside experts in nonacademic employment) for next Fall. This event will include two panels, one on SLAC employment (with three visiting speakers, one from Scripps, one from Walsh College, one from Bucknell University), and one on employment outside academia (featuring a Penn State PhD student working for the Department of Justice, as well as Jenny Furlong and Kelly Anne Brown, who will be familiar to the NEH group). We are developing a packet of materials to hand out to all attendees (actually two packets: one for humanists, and one for social scientists), which will begin to solve some of the problems we address below about faculty unawareness of these issues and possibilities.

This group has also made one very specific additional recommendation to the Dean: that she hire a permanent employee focused on extra-academic employment at the PhD level to work in the College’s career development office. ***CP 3***

II. What Worked and What Didn’t?

Our major accomplishments:

1. We developed a pattern/structure for integrating non-academic training into the PhD process from year one through the dissertation.
2. We made some very specific proposals to the Dean; we discuss the likelihood of their implementation (and the challenges to them) below.
3. We identified a very strong group of core faculty who are willing to work on this issue.
4. We raised consciousness across the College about resources/possibilities around non-academic employment.
5. Most importantly, we have improved our level of support on these issues for our current graduate students, and have plans to continue to improve support and awareness for them.

We believe that we have changed the environment in the College of the Liberal Arts, especially in the Dean’s office. Critically, in terms of creating departmental support, the Dean’s office—which tracks and ranks all PhD placements in the College—moved three years ago to “count” non-academic employment related to the subject of the PhD as the equivalent to a tenure-track job placement. While this shift was initially made in response to demands from departments offering PhDs in the social sciences, it has the advantage of assuring humanities departments that their efforts to place students outside the professoriate will not harm them in internal College rankings and evaluations.

Though this last sentence may seem a bit paranoid, our experience was that faculty and departmental anxiety about College-level evaluation was a major factor in their response to these issues. The first two questions we got at an open forum announcing the pilot project were, “Will having my student getting a non-academic job hurt me in my tenure evaluation?” and “Will having students take non-academic positions hurt our department in internal College rankings?”

What this suggests is that communicating answers to these questions is really critical. Hence the NEH group has also proposed to the Dean that she issue official statements on these topics, to be sent to all faculty and department heads. ***CP 4***

More broadly, we want to emphasize the value of #5 above: what has been really stellar about this experience is that it has brought together faculty and administrators who are eager and willing to make these changes. This core group, which includes department heads and directors of graduate studies, among others, has come together and developed the social bonds that will help us continue to make a difference beyond the grant period.

Challenges/what didn't work:

Of course at some level the challenges are more interesting than the successes... we feel pretty good about what we did well and what we really understand. So we'll have more to say here about the challenges.

We feel like there were two major challenges we encountered during the grant. Both of these were things we anticipated, but...maybe we didn't anticipate them quite enough.

1. The first has to do with something already mentioned above, namely the degree of faculty anxiety and ignorance, *even among faculty who had no other major objections to non-academic employment*. To some extent this is an easy problem to solve, but it requires a consistent practice of communication. We also need to develop a plan to *consistently educate* faculty about non-academic employment options for PhDs. One of the things we realized is that it's not just graduate students who need this information; faculty regularly told us that they can't help with these issues, "because I've never had a non-academic job." This is not a matter of one or two sessions about non-academic employment, but regular sessions in which the College takes the lead in communicating its values and goals to the faculty. With that in mind we are developing a "PhD careers packet" of information, which we will hand out at our Fall PhD career event, and also make available to faculty throughout the college. ***CP 5***
2. The second has to do with the degree to which some faculty and department heads are actively hostile to the idea of non-academic employment, or indeed to any major changes to existing PhD programs. These objections take two forms. (A) Essentially political objections to things like "the neoliberalization of the university" or the "transformation of an intellectual experience into a job-training program." These objects are *very strong* and probably not susceptible to change; such faculty have tended to refuse to participate in any of our programming, but they will be roadblocks in any departmental votes to change programs and so on. (B) Objections to changes that would affect faculty quality of life, for instance changes that would reduce the number of opportunities to teach graduate seminars, or that would reduce the opportunity to advise dissertations focused on traditionally academic scholarship. (C) Objections to changes that would affect departments—for instance the replacement of tenure-track positions in traditional fields by positions in the public humanities.

We don't know how much of this we might have mitigated had we known this in advance. The reality is that these changes go to the very heart of faculty self-identification in many cases, and that the process for changing those forms of self-identification is likely to be a very long one. Unfortunately, such a timeline does not match the urgency many of us feel about the issue, which creates an interesting and unsettling situation.

What advice would we give to future grantees? Our experience here at Penn State suggests that much will depend on local conditions. In our case the Dean's office is more open to change than the faculty or the departments. That made some things easier, but it makes others much more difficult. Knowing ahead of time what the situation looks like for your institution is really important, because it will help you focus your efforts. The other thing we would absolutely do again is to focus on building a local community of faculty who are invested in these issues, and who can make a difference within their departments. Those contacts have helped us build the pilot program at the College level and to implement that program through specific faculty within specific departments, without requiring 100 percent buy-in from everyone.

III. What Does It All Mean?

We've identified several major topics for future conversation and discussion. These may also be the kinds of things that are useful for future applicants to know.

1. The problem is not just non-academic employment

The vast majority of Penn State PhD students in the humanities are placed in institutions with 3/3 teaching loads. But we prepare every student as though s/he were going to get a Research 1 job. That is, the challenge at this point is not simply academic vs. non-academic employment, but that even within the category "academic" we are training students for a very narrow band of job opportunities (and: these are not actually even the jobs they tend to get, on average). Strangely, it turns out that faculty whose objection to non-academic employment is "the neoliberalization of the university" also object to any changes that would focus more on preparing students for jobs in teaching institutions and community colleges—even if a recent report from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences suggests that that is where the enrollment growth in the humanities is.

2. Some departments (and their students) are much more worried than others

Faculty in fields with robust job markets (humanists in Communication Arts and Sciences, and scholars of rhetoric and/or composition trained in English departments) are mostly uninterested in the changes we are considering here. They simply don't see why they would or should bother. Unfortunately, faculty in the two areas where placements are most under pressure, namely literature and history, are those most likely to resist changes on political grounds.

This means that a one-size-fits-all strategy may not be viable. College-wide encouragement toward change may simply strike some units as an inducement to make-work. This creates problems if your goal is—as ours is—to avoid creating second-tier or alternative-track programs. Our investment locally has been in trying to figure out how to radically alter the humanities PhD for *everyone*. But not everyone is interested in, or needs, change. This may mean that going forward we seek to thread the needle on this issue, as we have with our pilot program. It is likely that students who focus on the non-academic job market will end up, in fact, having an experience of the PhD (intellectually and professionally) that differs substantially from that of their peers.

3. Internship partnerships are hard to build

At one point in Fall 2017 we had a tentative agreement with Amazon to create an internship program for humanities PhDs, *as long as we could figure out how to do the program with the University of Washington*. Unfortunately several months of work on both sides did not produce a positive result.

Part of what we learned is that it is really difficult to build relationships with institutions (university, corporate, or otherwise) when you are far away from them. For Penn State, located in a small town in rural Pennsylvania, and hours from any major cities (2.5 hours from Pittsburgh, 3.5 hours from Washington, DC and Philadelphia, 4 hours from New York), this means that establishing regular ongoing relationships with cultural institutions (museums, e.g.), governmental entities, or corporations will be very difficult. We simply don't have the contacts or the kinds of proximity and existing relationships that would make this easy.

The other problem is that this makes it difficult to have base internships locally. This means that we have to be willing to support our PhD interns—especially when they work for non-profits, whose internships tend to be unpaid—while they live away from State College. And this in turn creates a special burden for students with partners or children living in State College, because it means that they have to leave town for 3-6 months (or a year) in order to get the training they need (thereby potentially disrupting housing and childcare situations). We are lucky to have the financial wherewithal to support these internships, at least to the degree required by the pilot program, but other institutions may not face the same situation.

4. It takes a long time to see if programmatic change is working

Consider the two students in our pilot program. We will not know whether the program “works”—which would mean that the students would end up with both a PhD from Penn State and a full-time job relevant to their degree—until five or six years from now. Even then, the *n* of our pilot is so small that we will not easily be able to identify factors contributing to their success (or lack thereof). We also do not have measures for success. What if one student leaves Penn State without the PhD, but ends up with a great job? Is that a success for the program?

We need therefore both to define success (which will have to be relative to what we think of as success in academic employment right now), and then to measure it. Because of the time-lag inherent to PhD programs, any changes we make will likely take several years to work their way through the system. Knowing that ahead of time, and being able to convince administrators and colleagues to try something new, whose effectiveness we may not be able to know or understand for several years, is a complicated challenge.

5. The situation may be changing faster than we can respond to it

According to a recent report by the American Academy, BA degrees awarded in English and History are down about 25 percent in the last few years. At Penn State, the situation is more dire: our numbers of English, History, and Philosophy majors have dropped 40 percent in the last five years. (Our language majors are doing better, but are generally down about 30 percent, except for Chinese and Arabic, which are up.) As undergraduate enrollments fall, especially at SLACs and research universities, it is unlikely that institutions will keep hiring tenure-track

faculty. (Consider: in 2007 the MLA advertised over 800 tenure-track jobs in Spanish. In 2017-18 it advertised 120 of them.)

So the problem is: even if everyone were willing to make changes, it might not happen fast enough to respond to these rapidly changing conditions. If tenure-track jobs mostly disappear the reality is that if we don't change the next obvious step for administrators to take is to cut PhD programs. In this respect we are in a race against time. Of course, things could turn around—perhaps this job situation is just temporary, and hiring will resume as normal in a year or two. But it seems unlikely, at least from this vantage point.

IV. What's Next?

We started this process (as did the NEH) in the hopes that we might be able to change the situation so that PhDs in the humanities would be trained broadly for full-time, stable employment both inside and outside academia. We are still hopeful about that possibility, and believe that the structure of the program we are piloting (see below) has the chance to make a difference. Our long-term goal is to make that program available to any PhD student who wants to participate in it. Having many students move through it will, we think, help convince faculty of its viability, and may even encourage certain faculty to think of themselves and their graduate programs differently. This will require, as we suggest above, moving the pilot to a much larger scale. Whether funding will be available for such an experiment—and whether the NEH can help make that funding available—remains to be seen.

That said, the effect of the planning grant has been overall startlingly positive. We have gone from a disorganized and planless institution to an institution with a core group of committed faculty, backing from the Dean's office, and a pilot program that offers us a chance to scale up as students and faculty express interest. In those respects things are really different from what they were 18 months ago. We are looking forward to seeing how our continued efforts can keep making a difference in the lives of our students, and in the long-term success of humanistic research, knowledge, and engagement with the world.

Appendix 1: Structure of the Pilot Program / Pathway to Degree

A. Initial Call for Applications from Graduate Students

The College of the Liberal Arts announces a pilot program designed to expand professional training and career outcomes for PhDs in the Humanities. The pilot program begins in Fall 2017; applications (described below) should be sent by departmental DGSs to Eric Silver (esilver@psu.edu) by 5pm, Friday, March 24

The Program

This pilot aims to integrate professional internship experience into humanities PhD training, including it both in the student's overall development plan, and integrating the experience into the research that leads to the granting of the PhD degree.

The College will support three students for this pilot program. Students in the program will receive \$1,000 to support their spending Fall 2017 researching and applying for relevant internships

(internships should be taken up in Summer 2018). We will provide relevant career and academic mentoring to all three students, helping them to select and then apply for appropriate internships, and working with them (and their faculty advisor and DGS, as appropriate) to think about how to integrate that internship experience into their research.

Assuming students in the program receive internships, should the internship be unpaid, the College will provide \$5,000 to support travel and lodging costs for the duration of the internship; students who find paid internships will receive \$1,000 in support for travel and other expenses. The College will commit to providing similar support for one more future internship, should that internship be considered by the student's committee and DGS to be contributing to the student's academic research program and professional development towards a career outside the university.

How to Apply

Only students who have not yet passed their comprehensive exams are eligible for the program. We will review applications and announce selections by the end of March 2017.

Applicants should submit two documents to their DGS:

1. A statement (up to two single-spaced pages, 12-point font) that describes how specific internships for which they intend to apply relate to their academic research and to their professional development; they should also suggest how they might contribute to the organization(s) whose internships they intend to pursue.
2. A letter of support from their primary faculty adviser.

In addition to these two documents, DGSs submitting applications should include a statement affirming departmental support of the student, and a general commitment to the pilot program.

Support Prior to the Application

Students wishing to look through lists of potential internships, or seeking support with specific applications, should contact Susan Knell in the College's Career Enrichment Network (<http://la.psu.edu/current-students/undergraduate-students/current-students/cen>). Students seeking specific advice about integrating internships with their research can talk to their faculty advisors, their DGSs, or to one of the members of the New Directions working group, listed below. We welcome opportunities to brainstorm with you about how this program might fit into your intellectual and professional development, so please do not hesitate to get in touch.

B. Structure/Outline for Students in Pilot

Note that the plan is an ideal and assumes a five-year time to degree; whether or not this holds exactly is less important for our purposes than that the major components of the program be visible. In some cases the student's need to take a second internship or develop an important job-related skillset will extend this program into a sixth year.

Year 1 Spring: Apply for program

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|--------------|---|
| Year 2 Fall: | Support in identifying internships Help with internship applications |
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|----------------|---|
| | Meeting with advisor/student to discuss academic program/path to dissertation Candidacy exam (includes discussion of internship plan) |
| Year 2 Summer: | Initial Internship |
| Year 3 Fall: | Post-internship meetings/discussion/future planning Comprehensive exam (includes discussion of scholarship-internship relation) *Decision point: does student need/want a second internship? If so, when? *Decision point: does student need/want to develop an important skillset (grant-writing, statistical analysis, e.g.)? If so, when/how? |
| Year 3 Spring: | Dissertation proposal |
| Year 3 Summer: | Dissertation (includes substantial component involving internship field) |
| Year 4 Fall: | Dissertation |
| Year 4 Spring: | Dissertation, or second internship as discussed |
| Year 4 Summer: | Dissertation, or second internship/skillset as discussed |
| Year 5 Fall: | Dissertation, or second internship/skillset as discussed Support/preparation for job market (academic and/or nonacademic) |
| Year 5 Spring: | Dissertation Support/preparation for job market (academic and/or nonacademic) |

This program is supplemented by three other forms of support: (1) group discussions among all students in the program; (2) meetings and mentorship with Penn State PhD alums working outside academia; (3) workshops and other events on non-academic employment for PhDs. These take place regularly each year.

Appendix 2: List of Participants

A. Members of the Core Committee

- Eric Hayot (Project Co-Director) / Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and Asian Studies
- Eric Silver (Project Co-Director) / Professor of Sociology; Associate Dean for Research
- David G. Atwill / Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies, and Director of Graduate Studies (Department of History).
- Michael Bérubé / Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Literature and Director of Institute for the Arts and Humanities.
- Lauren Brooks / PhD student, German

- Caroline Eckhardt / Professor of Comparative Literature and English at Penn State and Director of the School of Languages and Literatures.
- Debra Hawhee / McCourtney Professor of Civic Deliberation and Senior Scholar in the McCourtney Institute for Democracy, and Professor of English and of Communication Arts and Sciences.
- Patricia Gael / PhD, English, Penn State, 2015; she works as a technical writer at financial technology startup, Addepar.
- Robert D. Hume / Evan Pugh University Professor of English at Penn State.
- Nicholas Jones (ex officio) is Provost of Penn State University.
- Ann E. Killebrew / Associate Professor of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies, Jewish Studies, and Anthropology.
- Susan Knell / Director of Penn State's College of the Liberal Arts Career Enrichment Network,
- Len Lawlor / Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Philosophy and the Director of Graduate Studies for Philosophy.
- Xiaofei Lu / Gil Watz Early Career Professor in Language and Linguistics, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and Asian Studies, and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Applied Linguistics.
- William Oldsey / Member of Penn State's Board of Trustees. From 2003 to 2012 he was Executive Vice President of McGraw-Hill Education.
- Susan Welch / Dean of the College of the Liberal Arts and Professor of Political Science at Penn State.
- Rebecca Zajdowicz / PhD in German Literature from the Pennsylvania State University in 2010. She currently works for the United States Department of Justice.

B. Other Participants in Working Groups

- Shirley Moody-Turner / Associate Professor of English and African American Studies, the director of graduate studies for the Department of African American Studies.
- Sabine Doran / Associate Professor of German in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures at Penn State, and DGS in German.
- Michael Verderame / Senior Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
- Sarah Adams / PhD student in English who specializes in rhetoric and composition..
- Robert R. Edwards / Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Penn State..
- Sean X. Goudie / Associate Professor of English and Director of the Center for American Literary Studies (CALs)
- Erica Brindley / Associate Professor of Asian Studies and History and Director of Graduate Studies in Asian Studies.
- Daniel Purdy / Professor of German
- Robert Crane / Professor of Geography and the Director of Strategic Initiatives for Penn State's Office of Global Programs.
- Richard Stoller / Coordinator of academic advising and international programs at the Schreyer Honors College, Penn State University.

- Maria Truglio / Associate Professor of Italian and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.